

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9433

S E C R E T MOSCOW 9621

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJECT: BREZHNEV'S HEALTH

SUMMARY: IMPRESSION FROM HOUR-AND-FORTY-MINUTE MEETING WITH BREZHNEV TODAY IS THAT REPORTS OF BREZHNEV'S DECLINING HEALTH MAY HAVE BEEN EXAGGERATED. HE SEEMED ALERT, MOBILE AND HIS ENUNCIATION WAS NO WORSE THAN IT HAS BEEN FOR SEVERAL YEARS. IN FACT, HE SEEMED IN BETTER SHAPE THAN IN MARCH MEETING WITH SECRETARY. END SUMMARY.

1. I CAME AWAY FROM MY MEETING WITH BREZHNEV TODAY WITH THE OVERALL IMPRESSION THAT SOME OF THE RECENT REPORTS OF A SHARP DETERIORATION IN HIS HEALTH - PARTICULARLY THOSE EMANATING FROM PARIS FOLLOWING HIS RECENT VISIT THERE - MAY HAVE EXAGGERATED THE DECLINE. OUR SESSION WAS LONG ENOUGH TO PROVIDE SOME TEST OF HIS STAMINA, BUT HE REMAINED ALERT TO THE END. ALTHOUGH HE REFERRED TO A PREPARED TEXT FOR HIS BASIS COMMENTS, HE OFTEN DEVIATED FROM IT, AND DID NOT READ IT MECHANICALLY. INDEED, HE DELIVERED ALL HIS COMMENTS WITH A GOOD DEAL OF VERVE AND SEEMED TO CATCH THE POINTS I MADE PROMPTLY AND WITHOUT HELP. HE WAS AT TIMES FUZZY ON DETAILS - SUCH AS DATES OF MEETINGS (HE HAD TO BE REMIND THAT THE NEXT VANCE-GROMYKO MEETING WOULD BE IN SEPTEMBER) OR WHETHER THE SOVIET POPULATION IS 252 MILLION OR 258 MILLION -

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SECRET

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 09621 051819Z

BUT HE HAS LONG BEEN A "BIG PICTURE" MAN WHO DOES NOT RETAIN DETAILS THE WAY KOSYGIN, FOR EXAMPLE, DOES. HIS ENUNCIATION WAS COMPARATIVELY GOOD WITH ONLY OCCASIONAL - AND FOR HIM RELATIVELY SLIGHT - SLURRING. HIS WALK HAD A SLIGHTLY WOODEN CAST TO IT, BUT HE WAS QUITE MOBILE THROUGHOUT, SEVERAL TIMES RISING FROM HIS SEAT TO PUT BITS OF PAPER IN THE WASTEBASKET OR TO PERFORM OTHER SMALL CHORES ON IMPULSE.

2. THE FOLLOWING SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS MAY BE OF INTEREST
TO SPECIALISTS IN HIS HEALTH:

-- HE WORE HIS HEARING AID AND HAD NO APPARENT
DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING NORMAL CONVERSATION.
-- HIS FACE SHOWED NO VISIBLE MARKS AND THERE WAS NO
UNUSUAL PUFFINESS. (HIS FACE, INDEED, SEEMED LESS PUFFY THAN
IT DID TO DCM WHEN HE MET WITH ASTRONAUTS AND COSMONAUTS
OVER 18 MONTHS AGO OR TO ME IN MARCH
-- HIS EYES HAD A SOMEWHAT GLAZED OR, PERHAPS BETTER EXPRESSED,
OPAQUE APPEARANCE TOWARD THE END, BUT HE REMAINED ALERT TO THE
CONVERSATION.
-- HE STILL DOES NOT SMOKE, BUT HE ASKED SUKHODREV TO
SMOKE SO THAT HE COULD ENJOY THE AROMA.

3. OBVIOUSLY I CANNOT AND DO NOT PRESENT MY OBSERVATIONS
AS INFORMED MEDICAL OPINION, AND I WOULD NOT EXAGGERATE
THE POSITIVE. BREZHNEV'S HEALTH IS NOT ROBUST, AND HAS
NOT BEEN SO FOR SOME TIME. HOWEVER, I FAILED TO NOTE ANY
CLEAR SIGNS OF A RECENT SHARP DECLINE.

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